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Weekly Special Report



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INSIDE

Ethiopian AGOA Exports Show over 100% Annual Increase in 2008

FEBRUARY 24, 2009 Addis Ababa (U.S. Embassy) – Continuing a trend of accelerated growth, Ethiopian exports to the United States under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in 2008 more than doubled from 2007.

From January to December 2008, Ethiopia's AGOA exports reached USD \$18 million, surpassing USD \$8.9 million in AGOA exports during the 2007 calendar year. Total Ethiopian exports to the U.S. also rose 172 percent, to USD \$152 million from USD \$88 million the year before.



"This is a huge accomplishment. Ethiopia is one of the few African countries to show such a steady, marked increase in exports," says Addis Alemayehu, Chief of Party of USAID's VEGA Ethiopia AGOA+ Program. Ethiopia's growth

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Human Rights Report Sees Worldwide Demand for Greater Freedom

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — More people worldwide are demanding greater personal and political freedom, but many governments are resisting this trend, says this year's human rights report released February 25 by the U.S. Department of State.

"A disturbing number of countries imposed bur-

densome, restrictive or repressive laws and regulations against NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] and the media, including the Internet," the report says. "Many courageous human rights defenders who peacefully pressed for their own rights and those of their fellow countrymen and women were harassed, threatened, arrested and imprisoned, killed or subjected to violent extrajudi-

cial means of reprisal."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, in remarks at a press briefing for the release of the report, vowed to work with NGOs, businesses, religious leaders, schools and universities and individual citizens to "create a world where human rights are accepted."

She cited her many years

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of work on human rights issues and her determination to focus her energies on human rights in her capacity as secretary of state.

"I am looking for results," Clinton said. "I am looking for changes that actually improve the lives of the greatest numbers of people."

She emphasized that the United States believes it enhances its own security, prosperity and progress when the human rights of people in other countries are protected. "The promotion of human rights is an essential piece of our foreign policy," she said.

REPORT DOESN'T INTERFERE IN INTERNAL GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

The Country Reports on Human Rights Practices is an annual assessment of human rights conditions in hundreds of countries that is mandated by the U.S. Congress. This year, under the Obama administration, the report notes that the United States takes no offense at scrutiny of its human rights record nor should other governments consider the report interference in their "internal affairs."

There is, the report says, "a continuing need for vigorous United States diplomacy to act and speak out against human rights abuses, at the same time that our country

carefully reviews its own performance."

"We and all other sovereign nations," the report says, "have international obligations to respect the universal human rights and freedoms of our citizens, and it is the responsibility of others to speak out when they believe those obligations are not being fulfilled."

REGIONAL CHALLENGES

Authoritarian rule continued to characterize many African countries, the report says, citing the campaign of terror of the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe. But bright spots for 2008 were to be found in the peaceful elections in Angola, Ghana and Zambia.

Vietnam, Burma and China continue to repress human freedoms in varying degrees, and human trafficking continues to be a problem throughout the East Asia and Pacific region.

In response to questions at the February 25 press briefing, Karen Steward, acting assistant secretary for the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, said the report's criticism of China's human rights policies is not expected to stymie continued dialogue with Chinese leadership.

Steward said that for North Korea, where the human rights situation is "abysmal," human rights will be

part of the overall dialogue in any efforts to normalize relations.

Key challenges in Europe and Eurasia, according to the report, remain the strengthening of new democracies and stemming government restrictions on human rights organizations. Another pressing challenge is the need to address hate crimes and hate speech while protecting fundamental freedoms, against a backdrop of migration, rising nationalism and economic recession.

Human rights face "serious challenges" in Iran, Egypt, Libya and Syria, where activists continue to be imprisoned for their beliefs. In many areas of the Middle East as well as in South and Central Asia, governments continue to suppress the media and those who wish to access it.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

Naval Engagement in Africa Offers Health Dividends

By Jacquelyn S. Porth
Staff Writer

Washington — A program bringing together naval personnel and health care workers from 13 countries is in full swing in Africa.

On one level, the Africa Partnership Station 2009 initiative is about promoting maritime security and safety, but sharing health information is another valuable aspect. Under the concept, military and civilian experts are brought together on ships that are stationed in a region for a period of time to offer training programs at sea and ashore.

During a recent U.S. Navy ship visit to Senegal, for example, a marine hospital corpsman found that the Senegalese were eager to learn about treatments for heat exhaustion and snake bites. A flexible curriculum allows participants to pursue unexpected avenues of learning even as the agenda also addresses core training in nonlethal defense tactics.

This year, the USS Nashville is the main floating platform housing the trainers and health care professionals. Some African nations requested martial arts training, while others sought life-saving skills.

Private First Class Sidya Baidane of the Senegalese Special Forces said the individualized training between U.S. Marines from the USS Nashville and Senegalese Special Forces units promotes the sharing of experiences, from working on vehicles to synthesizing maritime intelligence.

Senegalese Navy Lieutenant Commander Omar Wade said the U.S.



Senegalese biologists practice maritime safety as part of Africa Partnership Station 2009.

Navy-led initiative, backed by international partners, sets the stage for future regional maritime cooperation.

U.S. Navy Captain Cynthia Thebaud heads the 75-person crew on the Nashville, which includes two dozen officers from 10 African nations practicing medical evacuations, fishery management, search-and-rescue operations and protecting marine environments. The program takes the form of workshops, seminars and hands-on training.

"Persistent presence versus episodic engagement pays big dividends" in Africa, Thebaud said. Besides stops in Mozambique and Senegal, the Nashville will make port calls in Ghana, Nigeria, Camer-

oon and Gabon in February and March.

The Navy asked Project Hope to be a partner in the initiative again this year. Project Hope is an international health education and humanitarian assistance organization with experience in 35 countries. Some Project Hope volunteers living aboard the Nashville are returning to Africa for a second time, having served as part of Africa Partnership Station 2008.

Project Hope recruited volunteer health professionals for this trip: emergency room and family practice doctors, registered nurses, a family nurse practitioner, a physical therapist, a midwife, an X-ray tech-

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rate for AGOA-eligible exports in 2008 is much higher than the 30 percent average of other AGOA nations.

The textile and garments sector, long considered an under performer given its potential in Ethiopia and the competitive advantage offered under AGOA's zero tariff preference, achieved the highest total exports with an impressive increase of over 100 percent from \$4.5 million in 2007 to \$9.3 million in 2008. Other sectors that benefit from AGOA also recorded significant increases, including agriculture

products (100 percent), minerals and metals (471 percent), and other manufactures (243 percent).

The VEGA Ethiopia AGOA+ Program, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is the only stand-alone trade promotion program in Africa working to increase exports to the U.S. under AGOA. USAID's VEGA Ethiopia AGOA+ Program has been operating in Ethiopia for the last four years, providing targeted intervention to support Ethiopian exporters gain a foothold in the U.S. market.

USAID VEGA Ethiopia AGOA+ was initiated in January 2005 and has made tremendous progress in contributing to the growth of exports from Ethiopia to the U.S market.

The project works in close partnership with the Government of Ethiopia, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Ethiopian Embassy in the Washington, DC, the Ethiopian and Addis Ababa Chambers of Commerce and Sectoral Associations, and other development partners including the World Bank Country Office in Ethiopia and the ECA Trade Hub in Nairobi, Kenya. ♦

Naval Engagement in Africa Offers Health Dividends . . .

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nician and a pharmacist. The volunteers are treating and educating patients at community hospitals in Ghana. (For more information, read their blog (<http://projecthopeinthe-field.blogspot.com/2009/02/project-hope-volunteers-return-to-ghana.html>).)

REACHING OUT TO COMMUNITIES

When U.S. Navy ships have room in their cargo holds, they typically carry donations as part of a community outreach effort called Project Handclasp. In Senegal, Nashville crew members from Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, the United Kingdom and the United States handed out Project Handclasp book bags with pencils and notebooks at the Gallo Diouf Elementary School in the village of Kinibour.

The head of the local teacher's as-

sociation, Djibrie Thianoloum, thanked the visitors on behalf of the students, teachers and parents. Thianoloum said the donation will help the children concentrate on their studies "so they can have a better chance to become successful professionals." Elsewhere in Senegal, medications, infant care items and hygiene products were distributed at an orphanage outside Dakar.

The USS Robert G. Bradley also supports the Africa Partnership Station initiative. It visited Mozambique where its crew carried out much-needed repairs at the Arcos Iris Orphanage in Maputo. The crew repaired an old septic tank, fixed the roof, painted the nursery and cleared away debris and weeds. The orphanage is home to 300 children and also offers health services and meals to the community.

The Bradley plans additional stops in Kenya, Tanzania and Djibouti.

Using the universal language of music, the Navy's traveling band, The Diplomats, offered a series of concerts in Senegal, playing the music of the late rhythm-and-blues legend James Brown and the rock group The Eagles. The Diplomats even played with the Senegalese armed forces in a joint concert. Senegalese conductor Ibrahima Mbaye said the experience was magnificent since "we all understand the music."

For more on the Africa Partnership Station, see "Africa Outreach Includes Training, Humanitarian Aid" (<http://www.america.gov/st/peacesec-english/2008/February/20080207152552sjhtrop0.2349054.html>)."

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

America Builds New African Partnerships to Tackle Piracy

By Charles W. Corey
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States and other international partners are helping African governments confront piracy and improve maritime security on two coasts of Africa. While the waters off the coast of Somalia rank number 1 in the world for piracy and armed robbery at sea and the Gulf of Guinea on Africa's west coast ranks closely behind in the number 2 spot, the two regions have different scenarios and different types of crime.

Jun Bando, the maritime security coordinator and U.S. Africa Command liaison for the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs, made that point February 19 in an interview with America.gov.

Looking at the problems in the two regions, Bando said, "What we are seeing off the coast of Somalia [is] ... acts such as ship hijacking, which is often committed on the high seas or international waters. In the Gulf of Guinea, the balance leans toward criminal acts that happen within a country's territorial waters."

In the Gulf of Guinea, Bando said, "We are seeing hijackings, kidnappings, considerable levels of violence" in criminal acts that are "typically more violent than what we are seeing in the Horn of Africa."

Small armed groups in the Gulf of Guinea tend to commit their crimes along the coastline, offshore and on offshore oil rigs as well.

"We have seen an increase in attacks" in the Gulf of Guinea, she said. "We are seeing a number of criminal activities that are happening not only in international waters but also within the territorial waters

nario where certainly international cooperation has a role to play" in prevention, she said, "but it would be hard to envision the same type of international reaction that we would see off the coast of Somalia"



A U.S. naval officer on patrol monitors the shipping lanes in the Gulf of Aden.

of countries, and involving everything from drug smuggling to trafficking in both arms and persons."

Turning to the situation off the coast of Somalia, Bando said there "the international 'actors' have come to play a very visible role in combating piracy." That, she said, "is a reflection of several factors, the most important being that Somalia has not had the capacity to deal with the situation on its own and has asked the United Nations Security Council for help.

"If we are talking about the Gulf of Guinea, it is a very different sce-

because there are governments in the Gulf of Guinea capable of acting, although they may require technical or other support.

Six months to a year ago, she said, the U.S. Department of State was reminding everyone that maritime security in Africa is not just about the Gulf of Guinea; the Horn of Africa is important as well. "We have since seen a shift in the attention to the situation in the Horn of Africa," she said.

Overall, she said, the United States and its African partners are very

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concerned about maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea and other regions in sub-Saharan Africa and therefore are interested in working with those partners to improve maritime security around the continent.

"We recognize that the maritime security issues that are of greatest concern in sub-Saharan Africa are really those that have to deal with natural resource development and management.

"We are not only talking about piracy and armed robbery at sea, trafficking or counterterrorism or law enforcement or other security issues, we are also talking about helping African countries to build capacities to combat illegal fishing, which is a huge issue," she said.

"Port security is a priority because it has huge ramifications for trade — for the flow of goods and the costs of shipping goods through African ports. When we look at the set of maritime security challenges, even though there might be a lot of attention focused on piracy, what we are really trying to do is approach this as a comprehensive problem set that includes fisheries management, law enforcement and port security programs as well."

AFRICA PARTNERSHIP STATION

U.S. maritime engagement with West Africa recently has increased, she said, particularly through the African Partnership Station (APS) initiative, which has provided a platform for both military and nonmilitary cooperative activities that relate to African coastal security.

APS is an international initiative developed by the United States Navy, which aims to work cooperatively with U.S. and international partners to improve maritime safety and security in Africa. APS is a strategic program designed to build the skills, expertise and professionalism of African militaries, coast guards and mariners.

APS is not limited to one ship or platform, nor is it delivered only at certain times. The program is delivered in many forms including ship visits, aircraft, training teams, and Seabee construction projects throughout most of the year. APS is part of a long-term commitment on the part of all participating nations and organizations from Africa, the United States, Europe and South America.

Additionally, Bando said, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has provided fisheries with observer training from the decks of APS vessels. More traditional military-to-military engagement activities have also

been conducted as part of APS and other bilateral programs such as training in small-boat operations or training in small-boat maintenance.

Additionally, she said, the United States has worked to enhance maritime security by supporting regional cooperation efforts both in West and East Africa and helping the African Union strengthen its capacity to take a leadership role in this regard.

Bando said the United States is "very encouraged by the strengthening of cooperation of countries in the Gulf of Guinea in maritime security and other fronts as well."

On the East Africa piracy situation, Bando said the United States is "optimistic that the international community is coming together to address this challenge in a coordinated way," but she cautioned that piracy off the coast of Somalia "is a reflection of broader challenges on land.

"There is no durable solution to the piracy problem off the coast of Somalia without a political solution in Somalia. The lack of security and stability in Somalia is the root cause of the piracy problem," she said.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

Obama Renews U.S. Commitment to Canada

By David McKeeby
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced a new clean energy initiative and joint efforts to confront the global economic crisis as both cited the close relationship of the two North American neighbors.

"I came to Canada on my first trip as president to underscore the closeness and importance of the relationship between our two nations, and to reaffirm the commitment of the United States to work with friends and partners to meet the common challenges of our time," Obama said in a joint press conference with Harper February 19 on Ottawa's Parliament Hill. "We are so closely linked that sometimes we may have a tendency to take our relationship for granted, but the very success of our friendship throughout history demands that we renew and deepen our cooperation here in the 21st century."

Obama and Harper announced the launch of the U.S.-Canada Clean Energy Dialogue — a collaborative scientific effort to develop new technologies aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and combating global climate change. The initiative also will look at new infrastructure to deliver renewable energy from wind, solar and other sources to power businesses and communities on both sides of their border.

"How we produce and use energy is fundamental to our economic recovery, but also our security and our planet," Obama said. "We know

that we can't afford to tackle these issues in isolation. And that's why we're updating our collaboration on energy to meet the needs of the 21st century."

Both countries already have made substantial investments in carbon



US President Barack Obama (L) and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper (R) speak during a joint press conference at Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Canada. (AFP/David Boily)

dioxide capture research, Harper said, and Canada can offer insight on its own experiences in developing a new regulatory structure to address emerging energy and environmental challenges.

Obama pledged renewed U.S. engagement in global climate talks, advocating the development of a globally inclusive cap-and-trade system. "We now have a partner on the North American continent that will provide leadership to the world on the climate change issue, and I

think that's an important development," Harper said.

Canada is the single largest energy supplier to the United States, and the two nations share the largest bilateral trade relationship in the world, estimated at \$1.5 billion in goods and more than 300,000 people crossing their shared border every day. Obama and Harper discussed the recently signed \$787 billion U.S. economic stimulus package and considered ways it could complement similar economic recovery efforts currently under consideration in Canada.

Continued expansion of bilateral trade relations is essential, Obama said, providing assurances that the U.S. stimulus package's controversial measure requiring U.S.-made goods for federally funded public works would be implemented in a manner that does not violate international obligations to the World Trade Organization or the U.S.-Mexico-Canada North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The leaders considered ways to strengthen NAFTA's environmental safeguards and labor protections, an issue of concern for the Obama administration.

The leaders agreed to take action to restore economic growth and stimulate demand on both sides of the border, as well as to coordinate efforts to strengthen the auto industry, whose very survival depends on a network of closely integrated manufacturers and parts suppliers in both countries. The two nations will also work closely to restore confidence in financial markets and strengthen the global finance system as they prepare for meetings of

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Clinton: Enhancing Relations with Governments and People

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — A significant part of Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's four-nation trip to East Asia was connecting with people in ways they had not experienced in recent years.

It is, Clinton said in several press conferences and at several stops, an effort to create a common understanding between the United States and audiences abroad.

"I see our job right now, given where we are in the world and what we've inherited, as repairing relations, not only with governments but with people," Clinton said to reporters in Seoul, South Korea. "We are in a time where public opinion influences governmental decisions more so than historically has been the case, even in autocratic and authoritarian regimes."

"We are reaching out to the entire world. This is a general effort to reengage with the world and to do so in an effective manner."

The trip included stops in Japan, Indonesia, South Korea and China.

On February 20, she spoke to 3,000 college women at the Ewha Womans University in Seoul. The topics ranged from foreign policy to her professional life and to raising a daughter.

"I had the vantage point of looking out at this very large audience of all these extraordinary young women,

and it made me so proud," Clinton said. "And I know that each one of them has dreams for her life, as we all do, and I'm hopeful that as we move into the future that more and more of those dreams will come true."

Earlier in Jakarta, Indonesia, Clinton

Clinton acknowledged there will be an enormous amount of official exchanges between governments — that is the traditional foreign policy approach — but by itself it is not enough. There will be disagreements, but friends, she said, can disagree and still work together. But she said that reaching out to people is an important element in the smart power tool box that is not traditional and not confined by ministerial meetings and staged events.

"Going into universities where the next generation is going to be thinking about their role and how they see the world and what they think of America, or walking in a neighborhood in Jakarta and talking about bringing clean water and health care thanks to the American people, that is part of the message we're trying to convey," Clinton said.

During a press conference with Indonesian Foreign Minister Noer Hassan Wirajuda, Clinton announced that the Peace Corps will be returning to Indonesia. Peace Corps volunteers left Indonesia in 1965 during a period of turmoil in which then-General Suharto eventually came to power in 1968. The Peace Corps is composed of young American volunteers who travel to nations that ask for assistance, and the Peace Corps volunteers live and work alongside local citizens with the goal of helping improve lives and livelihoods.

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toured health and water-treatment projects financed by the U.S. Agency for International Development. While walking through neighborhoods she drew a crowd of local residents as interested in her as in her interest about their lives and why they matter to the United States.

"It is not just about government-to-government, it has to be ... people-to-people," Clinton said. "If we talk to one another and we listen to one another, I think that we can further deepen our positive relationship."

Clinton: Enhancing Relations with Governments and People . . .

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The United States also will begin the interagency process of signing on to a treaty with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations that would bind it to the 10-member group, known as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia.

"This is the first time the United States has taken this step," Clinton said at a press conference in Jakarta with ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan. Indonesia, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and Burma are the 10 members.

IN CHINA, WIDE-RANGING DISCUSSIONS

Clinton said that she held wide-ranging discussions with Chinese officials that started from a simple premise: "It is essential that the United States and China have a positive, cooperative relationship."

The talks focused on matters of bilateral concern, but also broader regional and global issues. "It is important for the global community, which is counting on China and the United States to collaborate, to pursue security, peace and prosperity for all," Clinton said.

Discussions also turned to North Korea and the need to resume the Six-Party Talks, which involve the

Koreas, Japan, Russia, China and the United States, she said. In addition, China and the United States will resume mid-level, military-to-military discussions later in February.

Clinton said the two will also work together on other issues such as Burma and Sudan.

Ask Secretary Clinton a question online (http://contact-us.state.gov/cgi-bin/state.cfg/php/enduser/question2_state.php) about her trip to Asia.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

Obama Renews U.S. Commitment to Canada . . .

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leaders of the G8 and G20 major economies.

"The people of North America are hurting. And that is why our governments are acting," Obama said. "We know that the financial crisis is global. And so our response must be global."

On the diplomatic front, the two leaders discussed the April 17–19 Summit of the Americas in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, and Obama briefed Harper on his administration's efforts to formulate a comprehensive international strategy to stabilize Afghanistan.

Obama praised Canada's humanitarian aid contributions to the shat-

tered South Asian nation as well as its role as a leading contributor of combat troops to the 41-nation, NATO-led International Security Assistance Force. Obama did not ask for any additional Canadian commitments for Afghanistan, he said, pledging continued close consultations with Canada and other NATO allies — as well as governments in Afghanistan and Pakistan — as the United States seeks new ways to combine security operations with diplomacy and international development to help Afghans rebuild their country.

"The United States is once again ready to lead. But strong leadership depends on strong alliances, and strong alliances depend on constant renewal. Even the closest of neighbors need to make that effort

to listen to one another, to keep open the lines of communication and to structure our cooperation at home and around the world," Obama said. "That's the work that we've begun here today."

What actions do you think President Obama should take to promote economic recovery and international stability? Comment on America.gov's blog (<http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/>).

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

Biden Says Accurate Intelligence Essential for Policymaking

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration will need timely, credible and accurate intelligence from the nation's 16-agency intelligence community if it is to carry out its goals and objectives over the next four years, Vice President Biden says.

And it will remain the essential responsibility of the Central Intelligence Agency to provide that intelligence to the president, Congress and the U.S. armed forces, Biden said in remarks February 19 at CIA headquarters outside of Washington.

Biden conducted a ceremonial swearing-in for Leon Panetta, President Obama's choice to head the CIA.

"We're going to ask a lot of you. And it's only fair to tell you what we expect of you," Biden said to CIA employees. "We expect you to be able to look around corners occasionally, to imagine the unexpected. We expect you to provide independent analysis, and not engage in groupthink," Biden said.

And, always, the president expects to be told the facts, wherever they may lead, he said.

Biden spoke of executive orders Obama issued within his first month in office that included closing the terrorist detention center at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; the deployment of additional combat forces to Afghanistan; beginning a strategy review of

ble." The spread of dangerous weapons and technology threatens U.S. and global security.

The Obama administration's national security strategy will use all the elements of U.S. national power: military, economic, political, cultural and diplomatic, Biden said.

"We will use force if necessary. But we will engage in aggressive and active diplomacy. And we'll be true to our own values because America is more secure when the example of our power is matched by the power of our example," Biden said.

"This strategy cannot succeed, though, without timely, credible and accurate intelligence — it's the foundation of all we're about to do."

What foreign affairs actions should President Obama consider?

Comment on America.gov's blog (<http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/>).

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov/>) ♦



US Vice President Joe Biden (L) delivers a joke from the lectern as Leon Panetta (R) laughs during a swearing-in ceremony for Panetta as Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. (AFP/Paul J. Richards)

U.S. policies in Afghanistan and Pakistan; and enhancing U.S. cybersecurity. He also spoke of renewing relations with Russia and seeking diplomatic engagement with Iran.

"The next four years will be a time of great challenge. Al-Qaida continues to pose a serious threat to the United States and to our friends," Biden said. "We remain at war in two faraway countries. The global economic situation ... could make the world considerably more unsta-

Excerpts from Obama's Speech to a Joint Session of Congress

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
February 24, 2009

Remarks of President Barack Obama
Address to Joint Session of
Congress

[Excerpts related to U.S. foreign
policy and U.S. economic recovery
plan]

* * * *

[AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT]

As soon as I took office, I asked this Congress to send me a recovery plan by President's Day that would put people back to work and put money in their pockets. Not because I believe in bigger government – I don't. Not because I'm not mindful of the massive debt we've inherited – I am. I called for action because the failure to do so would have cost more jobs and caused more hardships. In fact, a failure to act would have worsened our long-term deficit by assuring weak economic growth for years. That's why I pushed for quick action. And tonight, I am grateful that this Congress delivered, and pleased to say that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is now law ...

I know there are some in this chamber and watching at home who are skeptical of whether this plan will work. I understand that skepticism. Here in Washington, we've all seen how quickly good intentions can turn into broken promises and

wasteful spending. And with a plan of this scale comes enormous responsibility to get it right. ...

So the recovery plan we passed is the first step in getting our economy back on track. But it is just the first step. Because even if we manage this plan flawlessly, there will be no real recovery unless we clean up the credit crisis that has

stability plan are the immediate steps we're taking to revive our economy in the short-term. But the only way to fully restore America's economic strength is to make the long-term investments that will lead to new jobs, new industries, and a renewed ability to compete with the rest of the world. The only way this century will be another American century is if we confront at last the



U.S. President Barack Obama addresses a joint session of Congress in Washington, February 24, 2009.

price of our dependence on oil and the high cost of health care; the schools that aren't preparing our children and the mountain of debt they stand to inherit. That is our responsibility. ...

severely weakened our financial system. ...

So I ask this Congress to join me in doing whatever proves necessary. Because we cannot consign our nation to an open-ended recession. And to ensure that a crisis of this magnitude never happens again, I ask Congress to move quickly on legislation that will finally reform our outdated regulatory system. It is time to put in place tough, new common-sense rules of the road so that our financial market rewards drive and innovation, and punishes short-cuts and abuse.

The recovery plan and the financial

[RENEWABLE ENERGY, CLIMATE CHANGE]

We know the country that harnesses the power of clean, renewable energy will lead the 21st century. And yet, it is China that has launched the largest effort in history to make their economy energy efficient. We invented solar technology, but we've fallen behind countries like Germany and Japan in producing it. New plug-in hybrids roll off our assembly lines, but they will run on batteries made in Korea.

Well I do not accept a future where the jobs and industries of tomorrow

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Excerpts from Obama's Speech to a Joint Session of Congress . . .

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take root beyond our borders – and I know you don't either. It is time for America to lead again.

Thanks to our recovery plan, we will double this nation's supply of renewable energy in the next three years. We have also made the largest investment in basic research funding in American history – an investment that will spur not only new discoveries in energy, but breakthroughs in medicine, science, and technology. ...

But to truly transform our economy, protect our security, and save our planet from the ravages of climate change, we need to ultimately make clean, renewable energy the profitable kind of energy. So I ask this Congress to send me legislation that places a market-based cap on carbon pollution and drives the production of more renewable energy in America. And to support that innovation, we will invest fifteen billion dollars a year to develop technologies like wind power and solar power; advanced biofuels, clean coal, and more fuel-efficient cars and trucks built right here in America. ...

[IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN]

Finally, because we're also suffering from a deficit of trust, I am committed to restoring a sense of honesty and accountability to our budget. That is why this budget looks ahead ten years and accounts for spending that was left out under the old rules – and for the first time, that includes the full cost of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. For seven years, we have been a nation at war. No longer will we hide its price.

We are now carefully reviewing our policies in both wars, and I will soon announce a way forward in Iraq that leaves Iraq to its people and responsibly ends this war.

And with our friends and allies, we will forge a new and comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan to defeat al Qaeda and combat extremism. Because I will not allow terrorists to plot against the American people from safe havens half a world away.

As we meet here tonight, our men and women in uniform stand watch abroad and more are readying to deploy. To each and every one of them, and to the families who bear the quiet burden of their absence, Americans are united in sending one message: we honor your service, we are inspired by your sacrifice, and you have our unyielding support. To relieve the strain on our forces, my budget increases the number of our soldiers and Marines. And to keep our sacred trust with those who serve, we will raise their pay, and give our veterans the expanded health care and benefits that they have earned.

[GUANTANAMO BAY]

To overcome extremism, we must also be vigilant in upholding the values our troops defend – because there is no force in the world more powerful than the example of America. That is why I have ordered the closing of the detention center at Guantanamo Bay, and will seek swift and certain justice for captured terrorists – because living our values doesn't make us weaker, it makes us safer and it makes us stronger. And that is why I can stand here tonight and say without exception or equivocation that the United States of America does not

torture.

[PUBLIC DIPLOMACY]

In words and deeds, we are showing the world that a new era of engagement has begun. For we know that America cannot meet the threats of this century alone, but the world cannot meet them without America. We cannot shun the negotiating table, nor ignore the foes or forces that could do us harm. We are instead called to move forward with the sense of confidence and candor that serious times demand.

To seek progress toward a secure and lasting peace between Israel and her neighbors, we have appointed an envoy to sustain our effort. To meet the challenges of the 21st century – from terrorism to nuclear proliferation; from pandemic disease to cyber threats to crushing poverty – we will strengthen old alliances, forge new ones, and use all elements of our national power.

And to respond to an economic crisis that is global in scope, we are working with the nations of the G-20 to restore confidence in our financial system, avoid the possibility of escalating protectionism, and spur demand for American goods in markets across the globe. For the world depends on us to have a strong economy, just as our economy depends on the strength of the world's.

As we stand at this crossroads of history, the eyes of all people in all nations are once again upon us – watching to see what we do with this moment; waiting for us to lead. ...

END EXCERPTS
(end text)

Obama Administration Imposes Tough Lobbying Restrictions

By Michelle Austein Brooks
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama has implemented some of the toughest lobbying restrictions in U.S. history, but it will take time to see if this new approach has an impact on governance, according to a lobbying expert.

Fred Wertheimer, president of the nonprofit organization Democracy 21, said President Obama has set out to change lobbying — professional advocacy for issues or groups directed at government officials — “in a way that we haven’t seen before at the presidency.”

Wertheimer spoke to journalists at the State Department’s Foreign Press Center on February 17 about the role of lobbying in U.S. government. Democracy 21 seeks to eliminate undue influence in American politics.

As one of his first acts as president, Obama signed an executive order applying groundbreaking restrictions to the roles lobbyists can play in the executive branch, Wertheimer said.

The executive order prohibits presidential appointees from accepting gifts from lobbying organizations and restricts appointees’ ability to work on issues on which they recently lobbied while in the private sector. It also marks the first time a presidential administration has banned executive branch appointees from later lobbying the same administration. This means that any political appointee will be prohibited from taking a job that requires lobbying the executive branch for as

long as Obama is president.

Wertheimer described the restrictions as a “very powerful first step” that signals the president’s serious commitment to preventing unfair influence in government. “In order to make substantial inroads, you



Among the executive orders the president has signed is one limiting the roles of lobbyists.

have to do it over a sustained period of time. It has to carry on beyond first days’ actions,” he said.

Not only are these restrictions unique in U.S. history, but no other country has implemented such measures, Wertheimer said.

As a senator and presidential candidate, Obama often demonstrated interest in limiting lobbyists’ roles.

“He has a long track record of being very serious and very committed on these issues,” Wertheimer said, noting that the then-senator from Illinois was one of the leaders who helped pass 2007 legislation that severely restricted the ways in which lobbyists could influence members of Congress.

(See “McCain, Obama Built Images by Pushing Lobbying Restrictions (<http://www.america.gov/st/elections08-english/2008/May/20080528084503abretnuh5.785769e-02.html>).”)

“Out of that came very tough new ethics and lobbying disclosure rules that ... pretty much shut down the ability of not just lobbyists, but lobbying organizations to pay for trips for members of Congress, to pay for their entertainment, to pay for their meals,” Wertheimer said.

There are thousands of lobbyists in the United States representing a wide variety of interests, including international issues. Countries from all over the world have hired lobbyists in Washington to make the case for their interests, Wertheimer

said.

Wertheimer emphasized that there is a difference between lobbying and bribery. Bribery includes pay-offs and kickbacks that enable officials to personally profit. The United States long has had laws that prevent and punish bribery and corruption, he said, adding that bribery occurs very rarely.

Lobbying is a system that “exists all over the world in democracies, where those with large sums of money and large interests try to get an edge in government decisions.” It is an appropriate act and inherent to the U.S. system of governance,

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U.S. Celebrates Women's Contributions to the World Every March

By Louise Fenner
Staff Writer

Washington — The life of the world-renowned marine biologist, author and environmental advocate Rachel Carson is the inspiration for the 2009 National Women's History Month theme, Women Taking the Lead to Save Our Planet.

Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring* brought worldwide attention to the harm to human health and the environment caused by the indiscriminate use of pesticides. She did not urge a ban on all pesticides, but called for more research on their safety, more careful use and tighter regulations. The federal government conducted a review of pesticide policies and, in 1972, banned the pesticide DDT in the United States. Carson and her book are credited with launching the modern environmental movement.

Every March in the United States, National Women's History Month celebrates the contributions of women to the nation's history and culture. This year's theme

"honors women who have taken the lead in the environmental or 'green' movement," according to the National Women's History Project (NWHP), an educational non-profit group based in California. Rachel Carson is "the iconic model" for the theme.

UNITED STATES ALSO CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



Lynne Cherry

Each year, the president issues a proclamation calling on all citizens to observe March as National Women's History Month, as well as a separate proclamation on International Women's Day. The worldwide celebration, begun in 1975 by the United Nations, recognizes women's achievements,

highlights issues of common concern and focuses on ending discrimination and increasing support for women's full and equal participation in society. In 2009, the theme is Women and

Men United to End Violence

Against Women and Girls. For National Women's History Month this year, NWHP asked for names of women who have shown "exceptional vision and leadership" in protecting the environment at the local, state, national and international levels. Rather than selecting only a few people from the 103 nominees, the group is recognizing all of them.

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH HONOREES HELPED OUT MOTHER NATURE

The Women's History Month honorees include scientists, engineers,

politicians, writers and filmmakers, conservationists, teachers, community organizers, religious or workplace leaders, businesswomen and others who took action to help heal the

planet — some by promoting legislation and education, and others by getting their hands dirty planting trees and picking up trash.



Alice Waters

Some are historic figures, such as Ellen Swallow Richards (1842–1911), the first American woman to earn a degree in chemistry and the first person to undertake scientific water-quality studies in the United States, and Mollie Beattie (1947–1996), the first

woman to head the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which administers the Endangered Species Act.

Most of the honorees are contemporary women, such as these:

Lynne Cherry, author of *The Great Kapok Tree* and more than 30 other children's books that teach respect for the earth;

Sharon Matola, an American who founded the Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Center, begun in 1983 to protect exotic animals that had been used in a documentary film but were too tame to be released into the wild;

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Meg Lowman



Sharon Matola

U.S. Celebrates Women's Contributions to the World Every March . . .

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Meg Lowman, a Florida biologist, science educator and pioneer in temperate and tropical forest canopy ecology, who runs a foundation for tropical forest conservation;

Sally Ride, the first American woman in space, now a promoter of youth education in science and technology, especially on climate change;

Shirley Nelson, leader of the Navajo Nation Trash Taskforce of Arizona, which helps communities solve solid waste problems;

Lorrie Otto, of Wisconsin, a founder of the natural landscaping movement, which promotes biodiversity through the preservation and restoration of native plant communities;

Alice Waters, chef and owner of Chez Panisse restaurant in California and head of a foundation that promotes healthy school lunches and educational programs such as sustainable school gardens; and

Betsy Damon, founder of Keepers of the Waters, headquartered in Oregon, which supports communities in the preservation and restoration of their water sources. She works in the United States and China.

The origins of National Women's History Month can be traced to Sonoma County, California, where in 1978 the Commission



Shirley Nelson

on the Status of Women initiated Women's History Week. Two years later, President Jimmy Carter asked Americans to celebrate women's historic accomplishments in conjunction with International Women's Day. Congress established the first National Women's History Week in 1981 and expanded it to a month in 1987.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, females account for 50.7 percent of the U.S. population (there are 154.7 million females and 150.6 million males). Women own 28 percent of all nonfarm businesses in the United States. For every dollar earned by men, women earn only 77.5 cents. (See the bureau's annual fact sheet on Women's History Month (http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/013129.html) on the Census Bureau Web site.)



Lorrie Otto

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a fact sheet on Rachel Carson (www.fws.gov/northeast/rachelcarson/) on the coast of Maine each year. The refuge was established in 1966 by the Wildlife Ser-

vice and the state of Maine to protect valuable salt marshes and estuaries for migratory birds.

For more information, see the National Women's History Project (<http://www.nwhp.org/>) Web site. Also see the United Nations Web site for

information on International Women's Day (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/iwd/>) and The United Nations and the Status of Women (<http://www.un.org/Conferences/Women/PubInfo/Status/Home.htm>).

The Library of Congress Web site on Women's History Month (<http://www.loc.gov/topics/womenshistory/>) offers additional information, as does the Veterans History Project (<http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/ex-war-womenatwar.html>) Web site on American women in wartime.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov/>) ♦



Sally Ride



Betsy Damon

Record Number of Farmers Growing Biotech Crops

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Washington — A record 13.3 million farmers in 25 countries are using agricultural biotechnology to help meet the world's food demands, according to a leading agricultural research group.

In 2008, the 13th year since biotech crops were first commercialized, farmers planted a record 125 million hectares (309 million acres) of genetically improved crops. That was 10.7 million more hectares than in 2007, the International Service for Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications (ISAAA) reports.

"Biotech provides solutions for today's farmers in the form of plants that yield more per [hectare], resist diseases and insect pests and reduce farmers' production costs," said Sharon Bomer Lauritsen, executive vice president of the Washington-based Biotechnology Industry Organization.

Growth prospects for biotech through 2015 are encouraging, according to Clive James, author of the group's report, *Global Status of Commercialized Biotech/GM Crops: 2008*.

In Africa, biotech farming began in two additional countries in 2008, the report states. In Egypt, farmers began planting genetically modified maize. In Burkina Faso, farmers started to raise biotech cotton. The continent "has perhaps the greatest need and most to gain" from the agricultural technology, James said.

Combined with South Africa's previously established biotech program, genetically modified food projects have established footholds in



*Biotech oilseed rape, one of the four main commercial GM crops.
Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty*

each of Africa's three main regions, helping policymakers and farmers in surrounding countries see the value of biotechnology to food security, James said.

In 2008, seven countries in the European Union were planting biotech maize commercially, increasing the numbers of hectares devoted to biotech 21 percent over the previous year, according to the report.

European farmers are coming to realize biotechnology's potential to increase incomes and reduce pesticide use, the report said. In February, EU members will meet to decide on approval of new biotech crops, according to Marcella Szymanski of the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Economic, Energy and Business Affairs.

"Farmers everywhere are waiting and watching," she told *America.gov*.

The report says that in 2008 some countries that had previously

adopted a biotech crop added new ones to their soils. In the case of Bolivia, farmers started to grow biotech soy. Brazilian farmers began growing biotech maize and Australian farmers started raising biotech canola.

Modified soybeans continued to be the principal biotech crop cultivated in 2008, occupying 53 percent of all biotech hectares. It was followed by modified maize, cotton and canola. In addition to those crops, the United States grows biotech papaya, squash, alfalfa and sugar beets.

INCREASING UNDERSTANDING OF BIOTECH

Since 2003, the State Department has funded programs to increase understanding of agricultural biotechnology and to address consumer and environmental safety concerns.

In 2008, the bureau expanded its

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Record Number of Farmers Growing Biotech Crops . . .

(Continued from page 16)

biotech outreach efforts to include a focus on food security and biofuels. It sent U.S. experts to Peru, for instance, to explain to government officials the benefits of agricultural biotech in biofuel production, Szymanski said.

U.S.-sponsored specialists met with farmers, university students and politicians in Germany and partici-

cultural biotechnology to health because it produces more nutritious food and food with fewer allergenic characteristics, James reports.

The crops also benefit health because they require fewer pesticides and reduce fuel consumption and harmful carbon emissions, he said.

Leaders of the world's eight major economies have called for agricultural research to accelerate, James

lowed by insect-resistant cotton and maize.

The executive summary of the ISAAA report (<http://www.isaaa.org/resources/publications/briefs/39/executivesummary/default.html>) is available on the group's Web site.

An overview of biotechnology crops in the United States (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/biotechcrops/>) is available on the Department of Agriculture Web site.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

Obama Administration Imposes Tough Lobbying . . .

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said Wertheimer, a registered lobbyist.

"It's a natural act that people are going to try to figure out how to protect their interests. ... The problem is when the rules of the game allow lobbyists to use money and other forms of financial benefits to gain a big edge on everyone else in influencing government decisions," he said.

The full text of Obama's executive order (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/ExecutiveOrder-EthicsCommitments/) is available on the White House Web site.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦



This farmer in Hawaii grows genetically engineered papaya trees.

pated in a biotechnology conference in Vietnam. The United States sent experts to South Africa to talk with legislators about conducting risk assessments for agricultural biotechnology. Experts also visited Egypt to urge passage of legislation that would smooth the way for new biotech approvals.

Officials in some countries lack adequate information to create policies covering biosafety, Szymanski said.

The World Health Organization has emphasized the importance of agri-

said.

The United States cultivated the most biotech hectares in 2008, followed by Argentina, Brazil, India, Canada, China, Paraguay and South Africa.

Biotech crops have been widely adopted by American farmers since their commercial introduction in 1996, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Soybeans and cotton engineered to tolerate herbicides have been the most widely adopted in the United States, fol-

In Democracies, Political Rivals Work Together, Clinton Says

By Michelle Austein Brooks
Staff Writer

Washington — In democratic countries like the United States, political rivals often work together after an election, Secretary of State Clinton said.

Speaking with a group of Indonesian journalists in Jakarta on February 19, Clinton said she had been asked throughout her Indonesia visit why she was willing to work for President Obama after running against him for the Democratic presidential nomination.

"It's because in our country, in our democracy, we try after we have elections to come together and look for solutions to the problems that we face," Clinton said.

"People get very invested in their campaigns and in their positions," she said. "But when it's over, it's important to say, 'Okay, what are we really trying to achieve here and don't we want to work for the good of our country?'"

Clinton said she was honored and surprised when Obama asked her to be secretary of state. While discussing the opportunity with Obama, "I became convinced that it would be an exciting and important opportunity to work with our new president and to try to send a different message to the rest of the world about what America was doing and thinking," Clinton said. "I believe strongly in supporting my country and serving my country," the secretary said, "and this was another way to continue to do

that."

Clinton said her dedication to service began when she was a lawyer and advocate for children's rights and has continued through her political career. "Some people get into politics thinking that it'll be glamorous or they'll get to be important," she said. "Well, that's the wrong reason to get into politics."



Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Indonesian junior school wave to journalists upon her arrival at Halim Perdanakusuma airport in Jakarta, Indonesia, Feb. 18, 2009. (AP Photo/Achmad Ibrahim)

"You have to believe that you're getting into politics to make a difference in people's lives, that your service will help somebody."

REACHING ACROSS PARTISAN DIVIDES

Cooperation often is found among rivals from different political parties, Clinton said, referring to Republican presidential candidate John McCain's Election Day concession speech. Concession speeches congratulating the victor are a hallmark of the American political process.

McCain will not agree with all of Obama's decisions, but "he is going

to be a contributing member of the government," Clinton said. She added that she hopes to see similar developments in Indonesia following its presidential election in July.

Several of the journalists, who covered the U.S. presidential elections and are reporting on the Indonesian presidential election, said that such post-election cooperation is rare in their country.

In response, Clinton said that although the United States has been practicing democracy for more than 220 years, it is "still not perfect." Just like Indonesia, a "young, vibrant democracy," the United States continues to work hard to maintain its democratic principles, which extend beyond free elections.

"You have to have people in the media, people in politics, people in business and academics all understanding that the purpose of democracy is to improve the lives of people, to give people the opportunity to make good decisions for themselves, to build a strong economy with a functioning free market system that will give people the chance to work and have a better life for themselves and their children," Clinton said.

An independent judiciary, a corruption-free government and a responsible free press are essential to ensure that "no matter who wins, the democracy survives and keeps going," the secretary said. ♦

Civil Liberties Group Helps Individuals Protect Their Rights

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — Most encounters in the United States between citizens and police take place smoothly, but some do not — and that is where an organization like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) can play an important role.

With nearly 200 staff attorneys and thousands of volunteer attorneys, the ACLU handles — free of charge — countless civil liberties cases every year and has offices in all 50 states plus Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. These cases address a wide range of civil rights issues, including allegations of police misconduct.

“We take police misconduct quite seriously,” says Reggie Shuford, senior staff attorney for ACLU’s Racial Justice Program, administered at ACLU national headquarters in New York City.

“In the United States we’re obviously very lucky to have a Constitution that grants us many rights which prohibit state police and local police and national police from infringing upon them,” Shuford told America.gov. “We have a healthy body of legal precedent and case law that have interpreted the rights that are enshrined in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and which further spell out the limits upon which states and local and national police agencies have to adhere to.”

Nonetheless, the ACLU serves a critical need, he said.

“Organizations like the ACLU have to remain vigilant about the protection of people’s constitutional rights



Raed Jarrar in his "We Will Not Be Silent" shirt

because not everybody does, in fact, adhere to the constraints imposed by the Constitution. And so when they step out of bounds, it’s important that organizations like the ACLU exist,” Shuford said.

Such nongovernmental efforts build on programs conducted by federal, state and local governments to ensure law enforcement officers respect citizens’ rights.

The United States has no national police force. There are thousands of police departments established by states, counties and cities. Other law enforcement entities, like the FBI, are run by the federal government. Some officers, like those of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), have very specific limits on their authority.

THE PROBLEM OF “PROFILING”

The ACLU recently won a highly publicized case filed on behalf of Raed Jarrar, a U.S. resident of Iraqi-

Palestinian origin, whose freedom of speech and freedom from discrimination were alleged to have been violated.

In 2006, Jarrar was prevented by TSA officers from boarding a Jet-Blue Airways flight because he was wearing a shirt which read “We Will Not Be Silent” in English and Arabic. When he was allowed to board his flight after covering the shirt with another, he was required to sit in the back of the plane.

The ACLU filed a federal civil rights lawsuit on Jarrar’s behalf in 2007; in January 2009, two TSA officials and JetBlue Airways paid Jarrar \$240,000 to settle charges that they illegally discriminated against Jarrar based on his ethnicity and the Arabic writing on his shirt.

According to Shuford, discrimination against people perceived to be of Middle Eastern descent has become more frequent since the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. But other minorities in the United States can face this kind of discrimination as well, particularly African Americans.

The ACLU recently settled a lawsuit filed nearly 10 years ago against the Maryland State Police for discriminatory practices in traffic stops on Interstate Highway 95, a heavily traveled highway in the eastern United States.

THE NEED FOR EDUCATION, CONSTANT VIGILANCE

The ACLU files lawsuits for only about “a handful” of cases across the United States each year, according to Shuford. “Litigation is

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Youth Worldwide Join in Call to Stop Use of Child Soldiers

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — Young people from around the world on February 12 presented U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with thousands of symbolic “red hands” to draw attention to the plight of child soldiers.

In remarks addressed to youth activists at the event at U.N. headquarters in New York, the secretary-general said the use of child soldiers is "one of the most appalling human rights abuses in the world today," describing the practice as a violation of international law and the most basic standards of human decency.

"The entire United Nations system and I are determined to stamp out such abuse," he said.

According to the nongovernmental group Human Rights Watch, which helped coordinate this year's Red Hand Day, youth from 101 countries collected more than 250,000 red handprints — some on individual pieces of paper; others on banners — inscribed with personal messages to call for an end to the use of child soldiers.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, a nonprofit group working to stop the recruitment of children in war, adopted the red hand symbol in 1998 as part of its worldwide campaign against the use of child soldiers.

Red Hand Day commemorates February 12, 2002, when the U.N. Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child came into force. This optional protocol prohibits the forced recruitment or use of

children under the age of 18 in armed conflict. Although 126 countries ratified the treaty, child soldiers still are being used in 15 countries or territories, including some that have ratified the treaty.

An estimated 200,000 to 300,000 children under the age of 18 are serving as soldiers for both rebel groups and government forces in armed conflicts. According to Human Rights Watch, these include



Red Hands posters by students in California.

children in Burma, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), India, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda — countries whose governments signed the treaty but still use children in their armed forces or support armed groups that recruit children in their territories or neighboring states.

In the eastern DRC, according to Human Rights Watch, child soldier recruitment has increased dramatically since hostilities escalated in August 2008. DRC children in the regions of Uvira and Goma collected more than 7,000 red handprints for this year's effort to end what the International Labour Organization has called one of the "worst forms of child labor."

YOUTH AIDING YOUTH

The Red Hand Day Campaign, an initiative of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, encourages young people to organize events to highlight the continued use of child soldiers. Activities include marches, petition drives, special exhibitions, public awareness programs at schools and presentations of red hands to member of legislative bodies.

In California, for example, students asked city councils to adopt a resolution declaring February 12 Red Hand Day. In Belgium, activists presented red hands to Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel De Gucht at a special event at the Palais des Académies in Brussels.

Among the goals of the campaign are:

Universal ratification and
ent of the U.N. optional

Stronger U.N. action against governments and armed groups using child soldiers;

Prosecution of military leaders who recruit or use child soldiers; and,
Increased support for the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers.

U.S. EFFORTS

The U.S. Department of Labor has invested more than \$20 million for projects that specifically address child soldiers in Colombia, DRC, Liberia, Nepal, Sierra Leone and Uganda. It also funds an additional 14 projects to educate children and

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Telling America's story

Youth Worldwide Join in Call to Stop Use of Child Soldiers . . .

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protect them from exploitation in countries recovering from armed conflict or in post-conflict situations.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has contributed more than \$10 million over the past several years toward the demobilization and reintegration of child combatants into their communities. In 2008, the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) funded two grants totaling nearly \$1 million for child soldier programs in Burundi, focusing on girl child soldiers. The bureau expects to fund additional programs in other regions of the world.

In October 2008, then-President Bush signed into law the Child Soldiers Accountability Act, which makes it a federal crime knowingly to recruit or use soldiers under the age of 15. The act permits the

United States to prosecute any individual on U.S. soil for the offense, even if the children were recruited or served as soldiers outside the United States.

In December 2008, Bush also signed into law the Child Soldier Prevention Act, which prohibits U.S. military assistance to countries that use or recruit child soldiers.

See also "Programs Help Child Soldiers Return Home (<http://www.america.gov/st/hr-english/2008/February/20080201170846ajesroM0.9215052.html>)."

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov/>) ♦

Civil Liberties Group Helps Individuals Protect Their Rights . . .

(Continued from page 19)

just one small part of the overall work that the ACLU does challenging police misconduct," he said.

"We consult on more [lawsuits] than we file," Shuford said. "Not every police misconduct issue results in a lawsuit. That would not be an efficient use of resources if you can get a matter resolved short of filing a case." He added: "The lawsuits that we do file tend to be large class-action lawsuits that take from five to 10 years to resolve."

"We [the ACLU] do our best work not necessarily in filing a million



Americans protest against a discriminatory policing practice that has been dubbed "driving

lawsuits, but in empowering individuals to stand up and speak out in their own behalf," Shuford said. Community groups that monitor police behavior are an important part of this process, he said.

"But we also believe there is a value in police-community partnerships as well, and so we support those things too,"

Shuford said. "While our litigation is obviously adversarial, a lot of what we endorse is in fact a much more collaborative approach in terms of police-community working relationships."

To help increase awareness regarding citizen-police encounters, the ACLU provides online publications advising citizens on the proper way to interact with law enforcement and ways in which citizens can join together to monitor law enforcement officials.

Shuford said his organization plans to continue educating citizens about their rights and letting police agencies know misconduct can bring lawsuits. "We need to remain vigilant, and I think that's what we've been doing."

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov/>) ♦